



CRS Parent Connection

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

Volume 17, Number 3



Summer 2009

New CRS video highlights families and services

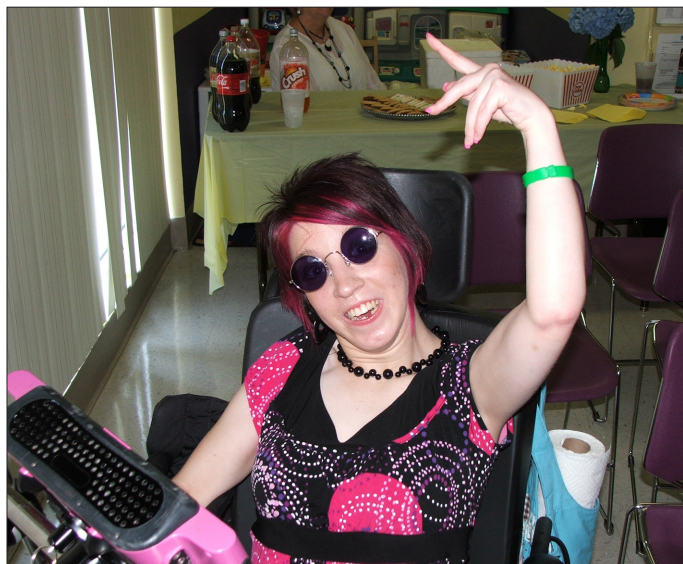
Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) recently "rolled out the red carpet" for the premiere of the new CRS video.

The 17-minute film tells the CRS story through five consumers.

"It's difficult to describe our services to people who don't know what we do," said David Savage, a state office administrator with CRS. "It's easier to show a real-life example, and that's what these five stories are – real-life examples."

Spotlighted are Ragan Robertson, 4, who is legally blind and has cerebral palsy; Mia Teague, 4, who has hearing loss; 6-year-old Tai Spain, who was adopted from China and has cleft palate and seizure disorder; Mande Jones, 20, who has cerebral palsy and uses an augmentative communication device; and 19-year-old Joel Wilmoth, who has a limb deficiency and was a member of the 2008 U.S. paralympic wheelchair rugby team that received a gold medal.

Because of scheduling conflicts, only two of the video's "stars" were able to attend the premiere. The pair – Mande and Mia – received gift bags that included a copy of the video, a certificate of appreciation, a still photo of them taken from the video, and other goodies. As befitting their celebrity status, the duo also each received a pair of sunglasses, which they donned happily. The remaining cast



Mande Jones, who is featured in the new CRS video, attends the video premiere at the Anniston CRS office wearing sunglasses that were given to her to represent her celebrity status

members will also receive a copy of the video and a goodie bag.

State Rep. Randy Wood, R-Anniston, and J.D. Hess, Calhoun County commissioner, who assisted with the funding for the video, also attended the showing. Each received a certificate thanking them for their efforts.

Savage worked on the project with Kim Wanous, director of the ADRS Office of Communications and Information.

Wanous wrote most of the script for the video, Savage said, with input from the CRS Parent Advisory Committee.

The two men worked closely with the production company throughout the

filming and editing process.

Copies of the video will be provided to each of the CRS offices around the state. It will also be distributed to lawmakers and other state agencies and be used as a public awareness tool at presentations and conferences.

Bobbie Jo Trammell, a district supervisor in Mobile, said she's excited to have an additional tool to use when spreading the word about CRS.

"Some staff worry about not having the right words to describe CRS," she said. "With the video, staff will feel more comfortable conducting presentations to let the general public know about us."

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Parent Connection is a complimentary newsletter published by Children's Rehabilitation Service for families of children with special health care needs. The goal of this newsletter is to increase communication and share information about children with special health care needs and their families. The newsletter reflects a family-centered theme throughout and serves as a forum for family members to share information, thoughts, feelings, concerns, etc. Nothing printed or implied in this publication constitutes an endorsement by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

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From the Director's Chair



Hello, Parents and Caregivers,

Summer certainly has flown by quickly! Already, it's the beginning of the school year – time for your children to adjust to new teachers and new classes and to make new friends. Here at CRS, we are also doing some adjusting – to the economy and a new round of budget cuts to our program.

The state allocation for the CRS budget for FY '09 (our current fiscal year) has been prorated (cut) by a total of \$1,514,315. Our original allocation was \$13,766,502. In December 2008 the state finance director notified the ADRS commissioner that all agency programs would be prorated by 9 percent. This was a \$1,238,985 cut for CRS, reducing the original allocation to \$12,527,517. In late July 2009, CRS suffered an additional 2 percent proration, for a further reduction of \$275,330. This cut reduced our current fiscal year budget allocation to \$12,252,187, for a total budget reduction of \$1,514,315.

The CRS program's state budget allocation for FY 2010 is \$11,660,252. We could possibly experience more cuts in the future, but want to assure you that services to our children have not been cut. We are working to reduce our costs in other ways, including making sacrifices across the state in operational expenditures such as travel, training and supplies/office equipment.

I want to also assure you, as I did in the last newsletter, that the CRS co-pays for families will remain at the \$50 and \$100 levels so that clients falling in those categories on the CRS sliding fee scale will continue to benefit from purchased services.

CRS medical and evaluation clinic services as well as care coordination services will continue to be provided in the same manner. We ask for your patience as we lose staff because of the state government hiring freeze that does not allow us to fill vacancies created by retirements and resignations.

We look forward to giving you more positive news in the next newsletter as we hope for improvement in the economy.

Until then, I hope your children enjoy the school year, and thank you for allowing us to serve you and your family.

Melinda M. Davis
Assistant Commissioner, CRS

Gadsden CRS teams up with Head Start

For the second year, the Gadsden CRS office partnered with the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project, Chandler Mountain Center in St. Clair County to provide hearing screenings to 30 students.

Kim Payne, CRS audiologist in Anniston, provided the hearing screenings. Sharon Espinosa, health and disability service worker with the project, also assisted. Though most students were bilingual, Espinosa provided interpreter services when needed.

The project was created in 1974 to provide continuity of Head Start services to children of migrant farm workers on the east coast.

The project prepares children for educational success by providing early childhood services for families.

Emma Hereford

Care Coordinator, Gadsden



Kim Payne, right, conducts hearing screenings while Sharon Espinosa serves as an interpreter.

CRS consumer spotlight: *Brad Holland*

Brad Holland became a CRS consumer after he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a 4-year-old.

Susan Gilley, a district supervisor in Dothan, said she remembers it as if it were yesterday.

"We came to CRS at the same time – June 1976," she said. "He was attending Cerebral Palsy Clinic, and I was a staff nurse at that clinic."

Brad was a CRS consumer for 17 years before "aging out" at 21.

The youngest of four children, Brad graduated from Rehobeth High School in the Dothan area.

After high school, he began took a job at Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center (WRC), where he worked for 17 years. For 11 of those years, he was the friendly voice that people heard when they called the agencies located in the center.

In July, he accepted a position as a service representative trainee for the Social Security



Brad poses at his job with the Social Security Administration

Administration office in Dothan.

To nominate a consumer, send emails to susan.colburn@rehab.alabama.gov.

Brad's Favorites

Hobbies? Drawing and doing things on the computer

Favorite food? Steak

Favorite vacation? Going to the beach

Favorite TV show? CSI

Alabama or Auburn? Auburn!

What can other kids learn from you about your diagnosis?

"Disability doesn't define the way you live your life. It's up to you how you choose to live with your disability."

Expecting the best for your child has lifelong benefits, rewards

Having high expectations is not an easy path to follow when raising a child with a disability. It requires challenging yourself, your child, and others to do more than simply assume that a disability limits a child. Choosing the path of high expectations is certainly worthwhile, however, because it improves a child's life.

Challenging your expectations

Parents have dreams and hopes for their children even before they are born or adopted. Often these are not expressed openly. But when we discover, sometimes suddenly, sometimes slowly, that our child has a disability, our dreams and hopes may have to change. We don't have to expect less, though we may need to expect something different than what we've imagined. One mother said, "I don't make assumptions now. I am more conscious of my hopes and dreams for all my children."

Parents can choose how they react to and engage in the "world of disability."

At PACER, we see many different parent reactions. Reactions and choices may be affected by one's culture, family values, personality, education, economic status, learning style, health, or self-esteem.

However, these influences need not define what we do. We can make intentional choices. We can't control the circumstances that affect our lives, but we can control how we react to those circumstances.

For example, I was a very shy person until I became the parent of a child with disabilities. I decided to overcome my shyness so that I could better advocate for my child. This has not been easy, as shyness is part of my basic personality. But I made a decision that speaking up on behalf of my child was important enough for me to make this fundamental change.

People who know me now have no idea what a shy, reserved person I used to be!

So why did I think I had to speak up for my child? Like most parents, I knew nothing about my child's disability.

Once the disability was diagnosed, I read everything I could find and talked to everyone who seemed to know anything about it.

I learned that there were conflicting views on how to deal with this disability. One method of



Marcus Thomason, who received services through ADRS, practices walking. Born with cerebral palsy, doctors told his family he would never be able to walk.

educating and rearing a child with this disability was popular with the school system. After considering that method and my vision for my son, I decided that the popular method was not appropriate for him. I would need to advocate for something different if I wanted my child to achieve the dreams I had for him.

I decided to challenge myself to speak up when I'd rather sit back and be quiet.

It wasn't easy, and it took a number of years before I was comfortable in my new role; but it was worthwhile. My son has done more than I ever envisioned. Virginia Richardson, PACER's director of parent training, wanted her child with a cognitive disability to be a reader, so she expected the school to teach reading. There were reading goals on every educational plan. She also read to her child, encouraged her to read at home, made sure she saw others read, and gave her books on topics that interested her.

She was intentional about her vision. Reading does not usually just happen; this parent used strategies to help make it happen. Her child grew up to be a good reader who reads the daily newspaper for pleasure and information.

While there is no guarantee that a vision will be realized, parents are responsible for making

an effort and every child's life is enriched by working toward goals. Stay committed to your dreams for your child, work with others, and keep in tune with your child's changing needs.

Maintaining high expectations can be difficult but worthwhile. Parents have told us:

- "It's been the biggest challenge of my life, and I know we're not through. It's been a challenge to be the best advocate I can be for my child and still keep myself sane!"

- "I can honestly say I don't stay up late at night worrying about my fears anymore. If my expectations have changed in anyway, they have only become bigger, wider, and more grandiose."

- "My son is going to teach us a lot more in life than we will ever be able to teach him. I'm holding true to my expectations for this child like those already in place for my older two children who happen to be physically and mentally healthy."

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DMH seeks feedback from consumers

The Department of Mental Health (DMH, formerly known as DMH/MR) is coordinating a series of county-based planning meetings to be held in September.

The meetings will explore how DMH can better serve consumers and their families.

Consumers, family members, providers, community stakeholders and other interested parties should attend these meetings.

At these meetings, DMH will:

- Review its planning process
- Review local needs and state-level priorities in services for adults and children with intellectual disabilities, mental illnesses or substance abuse issues
- Provide an overview of the budget outlook
- Review data for the mental illness, substance abuse and intellectual disability divisions


A directory of all local planning meetings is available in PDF format at a link on DMH's website, www.mh.alabama.gov.

The directory provides dates, times, and locations of each local planning meeting and is sorted by county. Please visit often as the document will be updated as new planning meetings are scheduled.

DMH will pay \$25 stipends to consumers and family members to help them pay for expenses (travel, child care, etc.) associated with attending these meetings. Information about the stipend can be found in the meeting directory.

If you have any questions about these meetings, please contact Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) at 1-800-826-1675 or by email at adap@adap.ua.edu.

You may also contact Michelle Vilamaa, strategic planning specialist at 334-353-7257 or by email at michelle@vilamaa@mh.alabama.gov.



Take a new look at ALL Kids!

Children's Health Insurance Program

Big news!
Effective October 1, 2009, income levels for the ALL Kids Children's Health Insurance Program are going up.

- Due to this increase, it is estimated that there are about 14,000 children in Alabama who might then be eligible for ALL Kids.
- Applications received by ALL Kids **on or after August 1, 2009**, will be processed using these new income levels.

Encourage Families to Apply on-line!
The online application for ALL Kids, Medicaid and the Alabama Child Caring Program is fast and easy! From the [ALL Kids website](http://www.adph.org/allkids), click on the [Apply Now link](#) and go directly to the on-line application.

Reminder...
[ALL Kids Regional Coordinators](#) are available for support in outreach activities, presentations and staff training that offer **FREE** contact hours for nurses and social workers. They can also keep you supplied with updated ALL Kids materials.

Cathy Caldwell, director of the ALL Kids program, stated, "**ALL Kids recognizes and appreciates all you have done to help us identify uninsured children and connect the families with the joint application. Please continue to help ALL Kids identify and enroll uninsured children.**"

www.adph.org/allkids 1-888-373-5437(Kids)

Course helps families prepare for future

A guardianship and special needs trust training will be held in Huntsville, Montgomery, and Mobile to prepare individuals with disabilities and their families for the future. A training was already held in Birmingham.

The course is designed to provide specific information on guardianship issues and special needs trusts for attorneys, care coordinators, other professionals and individuals with disabilities and their families. Except for the course for attorneys, the trainings run from 4 to 6 p.m.

It is designed as a series of workshops, each of which is personalized to the specific intended audience. Issues in guardianship, privacy restrictions, entitlement resource limitations, financial planning, inheritance, expectation management, and forms will be discussed.

The course is sponsored by the Alabama Family Trust, Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program, Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities, UAB Civitan International Research

Center, Alabama's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and People First.

Pre-registration is required to participate in the training. For more information, contact Anita Davidson of Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program at (205) 348-4928 or email her at akdavidson@adap.ua.edu.

Here is a list of the events:

Huntsville – Sept. 17
E.S. Brooks School of Real Estate
2312 Memorial Parkway, Suite J
256-539-3236

Montgomery – Oct. 14
Auburn University Montgomery
The Bailey Building
400 S. Union St.

Mobile – Nov. 12
Cottage Hills Baptist Church
4225 Cottage Hills Road
251-660-2422

Opelika CRS washes, repairs wheelchairs

The Opelika Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) office played host to a back-to-school wheelchair wash for CRS children and the community.

Volunteer youths Garrett Henderson Jr., Dante' Henderson, Quentin McNeil and Zannie McNeil III were on hand to wash wheelchairs while National Seating completed minor repairs.

The Bonner family of Phenix City painted the faces of the boys and girls, while the youngest children enjoyed arts and crafts.

Each child who attended received school supplies.

Beverly Floyd of Computer Services grilled hot



Volunteers work on a wheelchair during the wheelchair wash event in Opelika

dogs for the children, staff, and volunteers.

We are hoping for an even better turnout next year.

Sharon Henderson

Parent Consultant, Opelika

Parents learn more about IEP's

The Homewood/Birmingham CRS Parent Advisory Committee recently played host to a half-day training on individualized education programs (IEP's).

About 40 people – both families and professionals – came together for the meeting.

It was exciting to have a great mix of professionals and families from the community.

Nurses, audiologists, social workers, physical therapists, graduate students, teachers and, of course, parents were all in attendance.

Nancy Anderson and Tuwana McKee, both from the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP), did a wonderful job helping all who attended understand how to advocate for appropriate special education evaluations and appropriate academic, functional and developmental IEP services for their children with disabilities.

Participants also learned about the "least restrictive environment" or "LRE" mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and how to advocate for the due process rights given to us under the IDEA.

Here are some comments about the training:

- "Very informative. I will use all of the information provided in my professional contacts with parents of children with disabilities."

- "I thought both presenters complemented each other! I think they offered such encouragement to the parents in the room. Alabama is lucky to have both working to educate and encourage parents. I was very impressed with the seminar."

- "I have learned a lot. I'm ready for my IEP meeting. Thanks!"

- "Very empowering information for those parents in attendance - much NEEDED!"

If you are interested in attending future Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings please call your local CRS office and ask to speak to the parent consultant. We will make sure that you receive notice of future meetings.

Looking forward to seeing YOU at a PAC meeting soon!

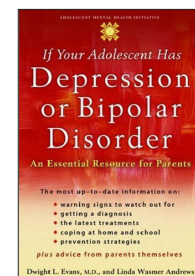
Tammy Moore

Parent Consultant, Homewood

Book Review: "If Your Adolescent has Depression or Bipolar Disorder"

As part of the Adolescent Mental Health Initiative of 2003, "seven commissions made up of over 150 leading psychiatrists and psychologists from around the country assessed scientific research as it pertained to prevalent mental disorders affecting children and youth from ages 10 to 22" (vii).

The second part of the initiative sparked the topic of this book review. *If Your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder, An Essential Resource for Parents* by Dwight L. Evans and Linda Wasmer Andrews tackles the often-sensitive topic



of depression and bipolar disorder in our youth while lending ideas to help parents learn how to effectively manage their child's mental disorder.

What I particularly liked is how the authors use real life stories from families that live and breathe the effects of depression and bipolar disorder in their children and youth. The book tackles the medical terms thrown out at parents (while they are still in a daze from the diagnosis) and give "parent-tested advice and practical support" by attaching insights from other families. In addition, there is a glossary that further explains terms.

If Your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder begins with the family's first moment of diagnosis and walks through the many barriers and concerns that each family most likely will experience. Whether questions may lean towards school/education issues, transition to adulthood, coping, or taking care of oneself as the primary caregiver, one is sure to find this informative book a must-have.

Please check out this book by contacting the parent consultant at the local CRS office.

Sharon Beech

Parent consultant, Jackson

Taking a Ride

At a recent Orthopedic Clinic in the Gadsden CRS office, Dr. William Stewart takes a test drive on an AmTryke before delivering it to its rightful owner. After popping a wheelie and almost turning the bike over, CRS staff thought Stewart would be the next patient to be seen in clinic. Stewart has a knack for making clinic fun and entertaining, Gadsden staff say.



Gadsden area launches spina bifida support group

Families from Gadsden and surrounding areas recently participated in the first Gadsden Spina Bifida of Alabama (SBA of AL) support group meeting.

Thirty people gathered at the downtown Gadsden Riverwalk Park for a day of fun. There was a range of activities to suit all members of the family.

Children enjoyed cooling off in the sprinkler, while other family members enjoyed fishing. Everyone enjoyed a hot dog lunch and cookie and snow cone desserts.

Most importantly, local families made connections with one another. Many families were able to exchange numbers and make plans to meet again.

Future support group activities and events were discussed. If you are interested in being a part of future Gadsden support group meetings, or would like to host a SBA of AL support group in your area, please contact Angie Pate at 256-617-1414.

In addition, several teens in the area have expressed a desire for a teen spina bifida support group. I am working on some ideas and organizing a group. If you are interested, please contact me at 256-235-3050 or 1-800-289-1353.

Sandra Hazzard

Parent Consultant

Anniston, Gadsden and Talladega

Audiologist performs screenings at KidCheck

Kim Payne, an audiologist from the Anniston CRS office, recently participated in a health screening at Piedmont Elementary School in Calhoun County.

The health screening was part of Gov. Bob Riley's KidCheck initiative, which brings free health care screenings to schoolchildren, especially those at schools in rural areas.

Payne worked with the school system's speech-language pathologist to provide hearing screenings for approximately 550 students, ranging from kindergartners to fifth graders.

About 10 percent of the students had hearing problems, and were referred to CRS, Payne said.

"This was a great event because it provided

students with hearing screenings that they might not otherwise have access to because of their socio-economic level and the rural area in which they live," she said.

Besides hearing screenings, students also received assessments on their height, weight, body mass index, blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, vision, oral health, and scoliosis.

Through the KidCheck program, schools partner with area organizations and an area college nursing program to administer the screenings.

Thirty nursing students from Jacksonville State University also participated in the screenings.

Please add me to your newsletter mailing list.

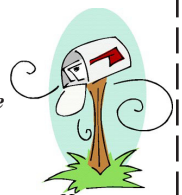
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City/State/Zip: _____

Clip and mail to
Susan Colburn
Children's Rehabilitation Service
602 S. Lawrence St.
Montgomery, AL 36104





CRS consumer Kyle McGee uses a touch-screen program during the 'Tech's Cool' event

CRS co-hosts 'cool' event

Homewood CRS consumers had fun playing with technology at the recent "Tech's Cool" event.

The CRS office partnered with United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Greater Birmingham and the University of Alabama at Birmingham to play host to the event.

"Tech's Cool" was for children with disabilities, 7 to 12 years old. Participants were introduced to various forms of technology, such as MP3 players, digital cameras, Wii, Playstation, web cams, and other devices.

The purpose of the activities was to help the children use the technology through adaptive means. Each child was paired with a peer without a disability to provide opportunities to develop friendships as well as learn the use of the technology.

Parents and caregivers were able to attend technology training sessions while their child was playing and exploring the technology.

"Tech's Cool" was held at LINCPoint, the facility for the UCP Adult Day Program. The event was free and open to 20 pre-selected participants. Of the 20 participants, 18 were CRS consumers.

UCPs receive respite grants

The Children's Trust Fund of Alabama (CTF) recently announced its grantees for 2009-2010.

This year CTF awarded a HEARTS respite grant to each of the six United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) affiliates in Alabama.

The grant offers \$100 in voucher respite to caregivers of children up to age 19 with a disability or chronic illness or who are at risk of abuse and neglect.

To apply for a voucher, contact the UCP that serves your county.

If you are unsure which affiliate serves your family, call Linda Lamberth at Alabama Respite at 256-237-3683.

Faith-based respite programs provide successful respite to families of children with disabilities in the Birmingham, Huntsville, Decatur and Limestone County areas.

Alabama Respite is working to establish more of these "respite nights out" in other areas of the state.

A church in Calhoun County will be starting a "respite night out" in the fall, and Alabama Respite is working with them to identify families who want to participate in getting that time out.

If you live in the Calhoun County area, and would like to be contacted when that program starts, please contact Lamberth.

Alabama UCP contacts

Mobile and Montgomery areas

Lisa Wiggins
251-479-4998

Anniston area

Wanda Currie
256-237-8203

Birmingham area

Sally Herring
205-944-3939

Huntsville area

Stephanie Wright
256-859-4900

Tuscaloosa area

Paula Peacock
256-345-3031

Shoals area

Alison Isbell
256-381-4310

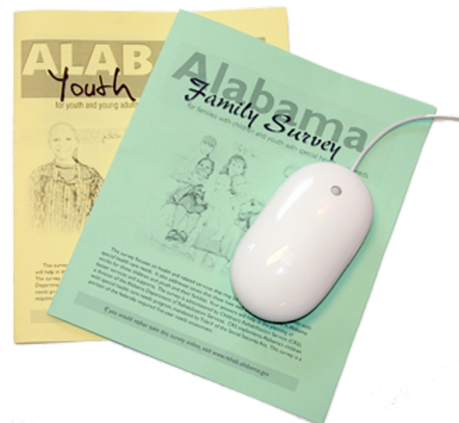
Survey time!

There is still time to fill out a survey about your experiences with Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS).

There is a survey that focuses directly on families who have children with special health care needs and one for youth with special health care needs.

We really want to reach as many Alabama families and youth as possible! You can help by taking these surveys.

Visit www.rehab.alabama.gov and select the survey that is appropriate for you.





Family Voices offers recommendations for national health care reform

Family Voices is a national organization of families with children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN). Through our national network, we provide families with tools to make informed decisions, advocate for improved public and private health care policies, build effective partnerships between professionals and families, and serve as a trusted resource on health care.

Family Voices recommends that the following policies be part of national health care reform.

Benefits must be comprehensive, flexible and continuous to address the unique and special health care needs of these children.

- Medicaid, including Early, Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT), should be preserved and strengthened given its unique and critical role in providing high-quality health care coverage for CYSHCN.

- The Family Opportunity Act (FOA) Medicaid Buy-In program (“wrap around”) should be strengthened by eliminating income limits and utilizing a progressive sliding scale for premiums. States should be given incentives to establish buy-in programs so that this benefit is available in every state.

- Pre-existing condition exclusions should be eliminated.

- There should be seamless transition without gaps in coverage and which limit administrative burden on families when CYSHCN change insurers due to eligibility for Medicaid, changes in family employment status, etc.

- Benefits must include comprehensive services from pediatric providers based on a child’s medical needs; decisions regarding medical necessity should be made by pediatric providers.

Health care must be affordable for families.

- No family should face unlimited or onerous health care costs. Affordability standards must take into account all out-of-pocket costs (premiums, co-pays, deductibles, coinsurance, costs of uncovered health care services, etc.)

- Annual and lifetime caps on insurance coverage should be eliminated.

- There should not be premium differences based on health status or utilization of services.

- There should be a progressive sliding scale for premiums and a maximum percent of income that families must pay for care that takes into account aggregated expenses of all out-of-pocket costs as listed above.

The health system must be family-centered, community-based, coordinated, and quality-conscious.

- Every child should have a medical home that engages with families to coordinate care.

- Families should have access to clear information about their child’s special health care needs and how to navigate the health system including community services, new information technologies such as health information technology (HIT) and health care financing. The Family-to-Family Health Information Centers provide a model for this

kind of cost-effective family support.

- There should be pediatric quality-of-care standards that address CYSHCN that are developed and implemented with family input, applied to both Medicaid and other health insurance plans and that are effective in promoting a high-performing health system.

- There should be adequate provider reimbursement in Medicaid and other health care coverage plans to assure adequate access to needed pediatric specialists and other health care providers.

Family Voices Contacts

Brooke Lehmann
Public policy co-director
blehmann@familyvoices.org
202-233-2770

Janis Guernsey
Public policy co-director
jguernsey@familyvoices.org
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505-872-4774
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Albuquerque, NM 87106

Family Voices Website
www.familyvoices.org

For information about Family Voices, please contact the Alabama state coordinators, Susan Colburn (334) 293-7041, susan.colburn@rehab.alabama.gov or Jerry Oveson (251) 438-1609, oveson@bellsouth.net.

Funderful Times – *Respite time*

With our son recovering from recent brain surgery and my father declining everyday, I thought my respite time would be spent on yard work. I thought that mowing my two-acre yard in first gear, moving slow for one day a week would relieve the dreaded word S-T-R-E-S-S from my life. But that was not the case on this particular day, which ended with a late-night/early morning trip to the emergency room.

Obviously, I wasn't focusing on the job at hand because when I neared the 4-foot bank at the road, the mower and I flipped in the air and landed in the bottom of the ditch, just inches from the paved road in front of our home. My head hit a rock, knocking me out. The mower – which was still running – lay on my right leg. Amazingly, I had no major cuts. My head, however, hurt worse with each passing minute.

While I was focused on the job at hand – or so I thought – I found that my need for respite doesn't include mowing the grass or clearing the “back 40,” so to speak. Respite must be more constructive than I allowed myself to admit. I thought that getting a chore done while spending time outdoors – away from the reality indoors – meant getting adequate “me” time. However, it didn't.

“Respite” is defined as “a reprieve, a temporary relief, a pause, suspension, an interruption, a pause of relaxation.” That doesn't mean picking up medications at the pharmacy, shopping for groceries, running errands, or doing laundry – much less mowing the yard ((screaming at myself))! It means meditating, reading something positive and inspirational, relaxing with a hobby that you normally would not do, taking a quiet walk, doing yoga, or sitting at your local coffee shop sipping coffee or hot tea and listening to music you otherwise wouldn't.

This definition got me to thinking about “Funderful Times” for you, the caregiver, the one who needs respite more than anybody else. I'm not speaking of selfishness. I'm speaking of the time you feel guilty for taking. So here is a list of ideas to create a “stay-cation” for your body, mind, soul, and spirit – away from the normalcy of daily living:



Rita poses with her family

- Visit a church sanctuary (a Catholic church offers time without being disturbed or questioned). Don't visit your personal place of worship, though. You'll have to play hostess to everyone you come in contact with.

- Walk slowly and quietly at a nearby park.
- Get a cup of coffee or hot tea at a local coffee shop or bookstore.

- Go to a late movie.
- Say you are going to see “Beth” (your new name for the library), then go, grab a book, and sit in a quiet corner away from crowds.

- When the neighbors are at work, go sit on their patio for a few minutes. (Be sure to get their permission ahead of time.)

- Take an art class, dance class, or music class.

- Join a community choir.

- Rise before or go to bed after everyone else and read the Book of Proverbs each day.

- Write a book review for your local newspaper. Newspapers receive hundreds of books from publishers, and once you have read one and written a review of it, you get to keep it.

- Volunteer 15 minutes to an hour of your time. In north Alabama, we have the Botanical Gardens and the U.S. Space and Rocket Center; in central Alabama, the Civil Rights Museum; in south Alabama, the USS Alabama and the Gulf Coast Exploreum. The list goes on, so check your area for other options. Just don't go take care of someone else; take care of you while

you learn something new. Churches are also a great place to volunteer.

- Start a daily journal.
- Take up photography.
- Write a book.

As for me, I thought God had a great sense of humor because after the lawn mower accident and recovering from a concussion and body trauma, I found that I had a double ear infection and strep throat. So, bed rest was inevitable. I had no option but to take care of me so that I could be all that my family needed. “Respite” means having the wisdom to know when you need some time alone, being bold and guilt-free in telling others that you do, and then taking it. It may require planning, yes, but at least it's on your calendar, and it's important to keep that appointment.

At the moment, I'm lining up family caregivers and a full week with our hospice group so that I can take a flight to Utah for an art convention, rent a car and drive home. I've scrimped and saved for this opportunity and not accepted words from others that create guilt or dampen my idea. After a year of caring full-time for my parents and walking the path with my son's brain surgery, I need some time to create within me respite and renewal. Then I'll write a book: “365 Ways to Relax.” ((Smiling))

Rita Huthcheson-Cobbs
Parent, Huntsville



Let's YAC About It



Future Leaders

Several youth who receive services from Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) participated in the 2009 Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), which was held recently on the campus of Troy University. The forum seeks to equip high school students with disabilities with leadership skills. During the weeklong forum, delegates take a trip to Montgomery for a Mentors Luncheon, a tour of the state Capitol. This year, Gov. Bob Riley met the delegates and posed for a photo with them. **Left**, CRS consumers Crystal Lane, Heather Lee, Samantha Partridge, Kelsey Parker, La Shun Alloway, Thomas Randolph, Forest Stafford, and Roderick Sewell gather for a photo after the YLF graduation ceremony.

School Word Search



BOOKS
BUS
CRAYON
DESK
ERASER
GLUE
GRADES
GYM
LIBRARY

LUNCH
PAPER
PENCIL
PLAY
RECESS
SCISSORS
STARS
STUDY
TEACHER

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CRS Parent Connection

Children's Rehabilitation Service
Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
602 S. Lawrence St.
Montgomery, AL 36104

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What's Ahead

September 2009

Community Meetings, a series of county-based planning meetings sponsored by the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Consumers, family members, providers, community stakeholders, and other interested parties are invited to attend these meetings. A directory of all local planning meetings is available in PDF format at a link on the DMH's website at www.mh.alabama.gov. If you have any questions, contact ADAP at 800-826-1675 or adap@adap.ua.edu.

Sept. 17, 2009

Guardianship and Special Needs Trust for Individuals with Disabilities and the Elderly, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., E.S. Brooks School of Real Estate, 2312 Memorial Parkway, Suite J, Huntsville, 256-539-3236. There is no registration fee.

Oct. 9, 2009

Spina Bifida Conference, "Bridges to Independence," sponsored by the Spina Bifida Association of Alabama and The Children's Hospital (TCH) in Birmingham. For more information, contact Betsy DeCesare at 205-939-5281, betsy.decesare@chsys.org or Angie Pate at 256-295-0757, angie.pate@gmail.com.

Oct. 14, 2009

Guardianship and Special Needs Trust for Individuals with Disabilities and the Elderly, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., Auburn University Montgomery Alabama Training Institute, the Bailey Building, 400 S. Union St., Montgomery. There is no registration fee.

Nov. 7, 2009

3rd Annual SBA of AL Bowl-a-thon, 1 to 3 p.m. (12:30 p.m. registration), sponsored by the Spina Bifida Association of Alabama, Paradise Lanes, 729 Sutton Bridge Road, Rainbow City. For more information, contact Angie Pate at 256-617-1414 or angie.pate@sbaofal.org.

Nov. 12, 2009

Guardianship and Special Needs Trust for Individuals with Disabilities and the Elderly, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., Cottage Hills Baptist Church, 4255 Cottage Hills Road, Mobile, 251-660-2422. There is no registration fee.